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ABSTRACT

This policy statement by a national professional association of history teachers from kindergarten through grade 12 begins by pointing out that history currently functions as the core of the social studies curriculum prior to college. This position should be expanded and enhanced as a matter of sound curriculum policy. History alone of the social studies provides an orderly plan, integrating the different elements from the other social studies and the humanities. History is the most comprehensive, integrated way of knowing about human societies. History's core concepts of change and continuity best represent the full context and complexity of human experience. History prepares young people for citizenship in the United States through a broader vision of the world. It expands the self-knoweldge needed by young people for healthy moral development. The study of history refines the habits of mind needed for academic achievement and success in the modern world. It involves: (1) determination of the facts with an open mind; (2) scrupulous attention to context; (3) sensitivity to the interplay between the immediate and the long term; (4) awareness of the perversity of sources; (5) resistance to conspiracy theories and notions about reality being predetermined; and (6) appreciation of broad reading and experience as a basis for conclusions. History's narrative approach uniquely conveys the human drama, infusing the past, present, and future by providing emphasis on chronology and sequential order, attention to rhetoric and verbal expression, focus on men and women as the nexus for historical forces, and concern with description first and analytical judgments second. History enjoys a wider support than other social studies. For these reasons, history should remain the mainstay of the social studies. (DK)

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HISTORY AS THE CORE OF THE PRECOLLEGE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

A Statement of Policy

by

The Organization of History Teachers

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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HISTORY AS THE CORE OF THE PRECOLLEGE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

A Statement of Policy

by

THE ORGANIZATION OF HISTORY TEACHERS
(A NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISTORY TEACHERS FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE TWELVE)

Only recently has the idea gained currency that the development of great minds and leaders was possible without immersion in the reading of history. THE ORGANIZATION OF HISTORY TEACHERS invites all the interested groups to recognize an important application of this simple fact: in the United States, history currently functions as the core of the social studies prior to college. We recommend that this position should be expanded and enhanced as a matter of sound curriculum policy. For most students, history offers a basic and essential part of their knowledge about human societies. It lends to the other social sciences a coherent scope and sequence. History, and history alone, provides an orderly plan, integrating the different elements from the other social sciences and the humanities. Consider the following reasons for continuing and expanding the position of history as the core of precollege social studies.

1. HISTORY IS OUR MOST COMPREHENSIVE, INTEGRATED WAY OF KNOWING ABOUT HUMAN SOCIETIES.

History establishes the full context of modern life by connecting in time and place, the development of art, law, language, religion, politics, commerce, culture, and society. *The Harvard Guide to American History* explains, "History, as one of the social sciences, naturally lays heavy tribute on economics, political science, cultural anthropology, sociology, law, statistics, and psychology, and seeks to use the special insights which these subjects derive from their intensive study of selective aspects of human behavior." Recent historians continue to expand our knowledge of ordinary people and everyday life through the use of methodologies from the other social sciences. For the first time, we are approaching a total description of the past.

2. HISTORY'S CORE CONCEPTS OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY BEST REPRESENT THE FULL CONTEXT AND COMPLEXITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

History possesses the interacting central concepts of change and continuity, which are universally observable features of the world in which young people live. In the actual world, political, economic, and social issues occur interwoven with other influences; they do not appear as neat problems to be solved by formulas. Through the concepts of change and continuity, these problems can be integrated. Social forces lose their context and complexity in the abbreviated historical backgrounds offered by the other social sciences.

3. **HISTORY PREPARES YOUNG PEOPLE FOR CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH A BROADER VISION OF THE WORLD.**

The study of history is imperative if we are to understand the United States and its place in the world. It prepares young people for participation in the democratic processes of our Republic. For example, an appreciation of the great debates in the writing of the Constitution and subsequent judicial interpretation requires a strict adherence to the context of the epochs in which these disputes occurred. This understanding is best revealed by a historical narrative detailing their evolution. A knowledge of the succession in human cultures prepares young people for understanding other visions of reality--a necessity for constructing a peaceful world.

4. **HISTORY EXPANDS THE SELF-KNOWLEDGE NEEDED BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HEALTHY MORAL DEVELOPMENT.**

The broadening of context, an imperative for historical study, expands the self-knowledge of young people. They become more aware of human differences and similarities in the historical evolution of human societies. History offers an explanation of the moral opinions governing human action in the prior generations. Young people acquire moral knowledge in context and fashion informed value judgments.

5. **HISTORY REFINES THE HABITS OF MIND NEEDED FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS IN THE MODERN WORLD.**

History refines the habits of mind needed for effective evaluation of contemporary problems. Historical study involves: (a) determination of the facts with an open mind; (b) scrupulous attention to context; (c) sensitivity to the interplay between the immediate and the long-term; (d) awareness of the perversity of sources; (e) resistance to conspiracy theories and notions about reality being predetermined; and (g) appreciation of broad reading and experience as a basis for conclusions. Thus, history provides young people with the foundation for academic achievement

and success in a competitive, changing world.

6. **HISTORY'S NARRATIVE APPROACH UNIQUELY CONVEYS THE HUMAN DRAMA INFUSING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.**

History's narrative approach accurately conveys human drama in a manner easily accessible to young minds. Historical narrative provides: (a) emphasis on chronology and sequential order; (b) description of man's journey through time in a single coherent story; (c) attention to rhetoric and verbal expression; (d) focus upon men and women as the nexus for historical forces; and (e) portrayals of the past that are concerned with description first and analytical judgments second. This approach sustains student interest better than the heavy reliance upon the analytical methodologies common in the other social sciences. Once the historical method has provided a context, the remaining social sciences should be offered as electives in high school or college.

7. **HISTORY ENJOYS A WIDER SUPPORT IN THE GENERAL POPULATION, AS A PRECOLLEGIATE SUBJECT, THAN THE OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES.**

People possess a yearning for knowledge about their roots. It will be studied regardless; it behooves us to have it studied carefully through dynamic courses in school. Geoffrey Barraclough summarizes this human drive by stating, "Man is a historical animal, with a deep sense of his own past; and if he cannot integrate the past by a history explicit and true, he will integrate it by a history implicit and false."

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